

E-BULLETIN

Land titling and rural development: effective instruments for progress and peace in Colombia

The first step to rural development: Land titling.



Photo: Office of the President

President Juan Manuel Santos handing over land titles to Maria la Baja residents. *Maria la Baja, Bolivar.*

Approximately 1.5 million plots in rural Colombia require formalization (40% of the total 3.7 million rural plots in Colombia). Among the displaced, land informality is much higher, around 76% of those individuals that owned land. Over the next 10 years, the Government of Colombia aims to address land informality on approximately 5 million hectares and assist 500,000 families.

On May 4th, 2012, the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, visited Maria la Baja, Bolivar to visit a businessmen-*campesino*¹ association (palm oil extractive plant) and to hand over land titles to Maria la Baja residents. Maria la Baja forms part of Montes de Maria, one of the regions most affected by armed conflict and in need of government intervention. Montes de Maria is also a focus of USAID Consolidated and Enhanced Livelihoods Initiatives, and a laboratory for piloting policy innovations.

President Santos praised the businessmen-*campesino* association, noting the reciprocal benefits for each party and spoke of the importance of this type of innovation as a fundamental element in improving quality-of-life in Colombia. He spoke of his wish to duplicate this model throughout the country.

The President also noted the challenges to rural development and spoke of land titling as the first step towards finding a solution. He noted that once titled, *campesinos* are eligible for credit and “subjects of credit have many more possibilities to progress.” He also noted that land titling is not sufficient to create growth. *Campesinos* also need technical assistance, markets for their products, and a favorable environment for growth.

The **USAID Public Policy Program**’s work to reform the INCODER (the Colombia Rural Development Institute) will enable the entity to lead the changes envisioned by the Government of Colombia.

The INCODER is tasked with improving the lives of rural populations and the country’s socioeconomic development via the implementation of agricul-

¹ *Campesino*: Rural poor; peasants.



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tural and rural development policies, in coordination with public and private entities. Land formalization is a key step to linking *campesinos* with government services and to formal markets.

In 2012 the INCODER aims to formalize 22,770 families occupying 400,000 hectares, and formalize an additional 37,230 families by the end of 2014. In order to accomplish these goals, the Public Policy Program is supporting the INCODER in establishing a strong institutional presence in the regions. This presence is accompanied by integral implementation plans that are harmonized with other government and private sector activities.

Together with the INCODER, the Program has been supporting the design of ***Rural Development Programs with a Territorial Focus (PDRET)*** in Montes de María, Southern Tolima, and the Southern Pacific region of Nariño. PDRET seeks a comprehensive view of the economic and social development of a region, in accordance with its competitive capacities.² It promotes the efficient use of soil and irrigation resources, seeking to ensure environmental sustainability of regional production.

In the aforementioned regions, the Program has accompanied the INCODER in establishing working groups on income generation, land-use, environment, public goods, and infrastructure, among others. This support has allowed the INCODER to actively participate with the regions on prioritizing activities, planning, and budgeting.

In coordination with Miriam Villegas, the new INCODER Director, the Public Policy Program will finalize the entity's reform, allowing it not only to lead the PDRET process, but also to implement regional sustainable livelihoods initiatives via an Income Generation Activity Fund linked to *Contratos-Plan*. INCODER will have the means to support *campesinos* by leveraging resources from the GOC's national and local budgets and funds from the private sector and cooperation entities.

There is little a campesino can do with only a title and piece of land. The campesino needs much more. He needs technical assistance, a market for his products, a favorable environment so that he can progress. Land is necessary, but alone is not sufficient. (President Santos)

² The region's competitive capacities are determined by its market potential, taking into account the local and regional supply needs, the internal market and exports.